Section III
PERFORMANCE, PRESERVATION, AND COMMUNICATION

Sections I and II of this report have looked at some of the complications and conflicts in the NPS/reenactor partnership. Section III will begin to focus on how that partnership actually functions, and how parks and reenactors can and do find common ground.

Successful relationships between parks and reenactors seem to focus on three important areas:

- performance
- preservation
- communication

PERFORMANCE

As soon as they put on eighteenth century clothing and attempt to step into eighteenth century reality, Revolutionary War reenactors run into the predicament all historians encounter sooner or later: the impossibility of ever escaping our own time and culture as we attempt to understand other times and other cultures.

Reenactors are very aware of this dilemma. Because they are performers, they grapple with it through the medium of performance, particularly by using the concept of "authenticity." This concept becomes a kind of language, through which reenactors negotiate many kinds of conflicts. Focusing on this language of authenticity can be a way for national parks and reenactors to create shared presentations despite some of their underlying conflicts.

Authenticity

Authenticity—a certainty that our historical facts are correct and more or less in balance with one another—is a central concern among reenactors, as it is among most people who work with the presentation of history. But reenactors understand this term in a specialized way, which is worth examining here.

The reenactor community tends to divide itself into three categories of authenticity:

- "farbs" (reenactors not deeply concerned with authenticity)
- "authentic" or "mainstream" reenactors
- "hard-core" or "super-authentic" reenactors

These categories are quite fluid, and vary according to who is doing the categorizing. But in general the community ranges from those who are content with a general approximation of the clothing and manner of the past, to those who are in search of as close an experience of historical reality as they can possibly

achieve. In general, reenactors are concerned mostly with material accuracy, although some reenactors add depth to their performances by using mannerisms, language, and other intangible artifacts from the past.

The "cutting edge" of authenticity moves continually toward greater historical detail and complexity, pushed by the standards of the "hard-cores" and sometimes by influences from outside the community.

- Films may influence reenactor performances. Until the 1992 film "Glory," there were virtually no African-Americans in the reenactor community. Today there are many within the Civil War reenactment community, a smaller number among Revolutionary War reenactors.

- Several NPS rangers told me that challenges or suggestions from parks had prompted some reenactors to re-examine their own portrayals, and to correct inaccuracies in their "impressions."

The great paradox of authenticity, of course, is that it is necessary to strive for it, while knowing that it is impossible to achieve. No matter how much time reenactors spend duplicating the material realities of the past, they still inhabit the present. Questioned about this, most reenactors are quite clear about the limitations of their efforts, and about the essentially theatrical nature of what they are doing. As one respondent to the 1999 survey put it:

> *We can never reenact any part of history, per se. We can give some sort of theatrical impression, but that is all.*

Another man, who reenacts both the Civil War and Revolutionary War periods, wrote to me about his understanding of "authenticity":

> *I do this as an art form. My impression is just that, my impression. I study this stuff, and I do what I feel I want to express… It's not natural for me to try to get inside the mind of my 19th century counterpart. What's natural for me is to project my own personality onto that time period.*

One member of the King's Own Patriots, the group discussed in Case Study B, told me that she enjoys "the sense of experiencing the past in a very modified way." Although they differ in how they express this concept, nearly all the reenactors I have spoken with have been quite clear about the fact that they are performing a version of the past, not stepping into it literally.

Authenticity as a language of negotiation

Just as they may use issues of safety to mask underlying questions about values, reenactors often use issues of authenticity as a way of talking about many different kinds of conflict.

- Whether women should be allowed to portray soldiers is a perennial debate within the reenactor community. My research into Civil War reenactment suggests that most of the negotiation over the issue has been framed in terms of authenticity: How accurate is it to have women "disguised" as soldiers? Do the women who attempt this "impression" carry it off convincingly? If not, are they any less convincing than male reenactors who are overweight or obviously inaccurate in some other way? Clearly, what is really taking place here is a contemporary struggle over gender. But reenactors' public discussion of the subject is generally kept within the framework of authenticity, perhaps because this blunts the edge of the contemporary tensions and allows for some kind of consensus to be worked out.

In the case of the NPS/reenactor partnership, the most contentious issue is the ban on battle reenactments. Yet here, too, the language of authenticity may be helpful in reaching some kind of consensus.

As I have already noted in Section I, the reenactor community is not a monolithic entity, but a group of people with varying opinions. Despite the importance of battle reenactments to reenactment as a whole, there is still discussion within the community about the effect that this kind of performance has on an audience.

Excerpts from a recent discussion on the RevList, a Revolutionary War reenactor listserve, illustrate how some reenactors approach this volatile subject:

> *I have seen reenactors put on ridiculous death scenes, speeches, exhortations, etc. …I have seen people falling wounded and then propping themselves up to watch the rest of the battle, causing laughter in the crowd. I have seen people whose interpretation of wounds or even the act of dying has caused people in the crowd to laugh. I can see why NPS doesn't want this sort of thing. It* does *dishonor those who fought and died… This boils down to: When casualties are done right, it's too real for most people to take; when it's not done right, it's laughable. Neither one is acceptable. Perhaps there is a middle ground…* (jpryan)

> *I suspect that this will be wildly unpopular in some quarters, but I submit that if our objective is to demonstrate to the crowd the effect of musketry or cannon fire on a body of soldiers in a given formation, simply having the casualties kneel in place at*

> *appropriate moments would have all the pedagogical value required, especially if reinforced by the commentary of a competent narrator… I don't advocate kneeling casualties as* the *solution. No, no, no. The request was for middle ground, and I'm only trying to help find some.* (cts3)

> *[Reenacted battle] trivializes nothing. In fact, I really think that after the battles, the casualties shouldn't come back to life, but, should be hauled off the field, to the morgue or hospital…with bloody bandages covering their "wounds." We portray war. War is an ugly business. It should be portrayed as such. We do honor to the men who fought by retelling their tale and telling that tale in grim detail. To sanitize this history is to do a disservice to the men who fought for their beliefs and the public, whom we ostensibly seek to educate.* (coldstream)

> *Let's face it. The spectators get a pretty sanitized view of war [through reenactment]. My Dad (Omaha Beach 3rd Wave) thinks the two reenactments he saw were pretty tame. He complimented me on how we kept it from being too realistic so the kids could watch it. He thought it was tame on purpose and he has I think the right idea… [T]he crowd isn't going to get transported back in time to any real sense of what happened… It's symbolic anyway.* (The_Culinary_Artist)

Throughout this exchange, and others like it that arise from time to time among reenactors, the focus is on issues of performance. What degree of realism are reenactors looking for? Does the reenactment convey to the audience what they hope it will? If not, what techniques might convey it more precisely? Given the essentially symbolic nature of reenactment and the limits of "authenticity," what is the best way to represent and honor the soldiers of the past? The language of authenticity and performance is a way for reenactors to work out these and many other questions about how and why they commemorate war.

The NPS and authenticity

There has perhaps been a tendency for some NPS staff, by virtue of their professional or official status, to view Park Service interpretations as inherently more authentic than reenactors'. Particularly if this view is expressed in a condescending manner (see "Communication," below), it may contribute greatly to reenactors' perception that they are not valued or welcomed by the NPS.

It is crucial for parks to remember, then, that the language of authenticity is just as relative and problematic for Park Service interpreters as it is for reenactors. All representations of history are just that—representations, not realities. When they

perceive good reasons for it, both parks and reenactors are capable of turning a blind eye to authenticity.

- Safety concerns nearly always work against authenticity. Elevating musket barrels, removing rammers, not using bayonets, establishing a minimum time between cannon shots—all of these precautions are observed by reenactors as well as parks. Although the degree may differ (for example, the NPS's rules on cannon firing are much more stringent than reenactors'), the simple need to keep spectators and participants safe means that authenticity must be sacrificed.

- The use of narration, especially over a public address system, always works against the idea that spectators are seeing "actual" or "authentic" versions of the past. Yet narration can help reenactment to work as both education and performance, making it a useful enough tool that it is frequently employed by both parks and reenactors.

- Parks and reenactors are always looking for ways to capture and hold visitors' attention. Some means of doing this are not authentic, but are popular enough that they are used anyway.

  An example is the presence of the 1st Michigan Fife and Drum Corps at Minute Man NHP. This group, made up mostly of young people from Michigan, has been appearing at Patriots Day events in Massachusetts for almost 20 years. There was no historical 1st Michigan Regiment (since there was no Michigan during the Revolution) and the group's clothing—fringed hunting shirts and trousers—is highly inappropriate for early Revolutionary New England. Moreover, their performances at Minute Man—parading and playing for the audience before the "soldiers" arrive—are intended to entertain and divert the audience, not to represent any of the historical events of April 19, 1775.

  However, the 1st Michigan seems accepted by both reenactors and park staff, probably because the group is very popular with audiences. Music is a valued component of reenactments, partly because it creates an appropriate atmosphere, and partly because it can—as the 1st Michigan successfully does—keep an audience happy during sometimes-lengthy pauses in the program. Moreover, the 1st Michigan is itself a local tradition on Patriots Day; it has a history of its own, even if it does not relate directly to eighteenth century history.

  In this case, I heard no comments from park staff or reenactors about "farby" clothing or interpretive techniques that entertained without educating.

Like reenactors, then, national parks work within flexible definitions of authenticity to create representations of history that are approximate at best. If parks can recognize this as an existing piece of common ground with reenactors, it may help both groups to communicate more skillfully in the language of authenticity through which reenactors negotiate their own conflicts and questions.

Other issues of performance

- **Different levels of performance skill among reenactors**

Just as there are different levels of authenticity among reenactors, there are differing levels of performative skill. Some reenactors are primarily interested in "blowing powder" or socializing, while others are looking for opportunities to portray "first-person" characters or to hone their interpretive skills.

Sometimes the same reenactor may want to pursue different aspects of reenactment at different events. Some of the "pickets" (designated interpreters) at Minute Man NHP like to "fight" at other events, but choose to act as interpreters at the Battle Road event. Members of the King's Own Patriots told me that they enjoyed the contrast between large-scale events, which were more spectacular, and quieter weekends like their encampment at Kings Mountain NMP (see Case Study B), where they could work on making accouterments, honing their impressions, and speaking with visitors.

National parks should recognize this range of interests and skills among reenactors, and consider it in planning for reenactor events at parks.

- One reenactor suggested that parks and other sites should consider blending professional or semi-professional historical actors with avocational reenactment groups. For instance, drawing on the story of Major Patrick Ferguson in the Carolinas, this reenactor envisioned a muster scene in which Ferguson, portrayed by a skilled reenactor or professional living historian, issued his infamous "pissing summons" to a group of somewhat-reluctant recruits, portrayed by reenactors. This scenario would offer several things:

    - inherent dramatic interest
    - a way to include many of the park's interpretive themes (for example, the complexity of divided loyalties in the Carolinas during the Revolution)
    - a way for actors/reenactors of differing skill levels to participate in a lively and unusual scenario, something that most reenactors enjoy
    - a chance for interested reenactors to learn new interpretive skills and historical information

- **Using historical resources to create innovative scenarios**

  Reenactors assemble their historical performances from many different materials, but they are particularly excited by primary sources, which can give them new or obscure glimpses into past realities. National parks, with their access to NPS and other historical resources, are a potential source of information that reenactors can use to add depth to their impressions and to create interesting scenarios.

  These scenarios need not center on battles to attract reenactors. As one RevList member commented recently, "I don't feel you have to burn powder to experience a thrill up your spine" (Rcoyle). If park staff can think about performance and recognize the specific kinds of performative skills reenactors bring to parks, they may be able to find ways to design scenarios that will further parks' interpretive missions while appealing to reenactors as well.

  - The Chief Ranger at Ninety-Six NHP, himself an experienced living historian, investigated the period when Ninety-Six was a regional judicial seat, an aspect of the area's history that had not been adequately represented in the park's interpretation. He used his research to develop "judicial dramas" that are held occasionally on the back porch of the park's eighteenth century log cabin.

    These scenarios offer reenactors interesting theatrical roles, provide opportunities for visitors to become part of the event, and deepen everyone's understanding of Ninety-Six's historical context.

  - Minute Man NHP holds similar "town meetings," run by an experienced reenactor who is a regular park volunteer.

  - During my research among Civil War reenactors, one of the most striking scenarios I participated in was a train ride from a newly-reopened station south of Boston. To commemorate the revival of the train line, the hosts had arranged a reenactment of the trip to Boston made by the first Massachusetts regiment to answer Lincoln's call for troops in 1861. We disembarked at South Station, marched through the downtown streets to a rally in Faneuil Hall, then progressed to a ceremony at the State House.

    The participating reenactors were excited by the novelty of the scenario, the access to important historic sites, and the day-long immersion in an alternate reality. Admittedly, this event required a great deal of planning by both the organizers and the reenactor leaders, but the consensus afterward was that the effort had been worthwhile.

  If parks can use their resources and connections to create innovative scenarios involving reenactors, they can accomplish many things:

- ongoing relationship-building with interested reenactor units
- sharing of resources between parks and reenactors
- working within the language of authenticity
- increased depth in reenactor interpretation at parks

- **Parks as stages**

If reenactors are performers, then the places where they appear become stage settings. At national parks, reenactor activities are shaped by the physical landscape, and also by the history of what took place there. This point will be examined in more detail in the case studies in this report, but it is worth noting here as well.

- Among Revolutionary War parks, Minute Man NHP is perhaps the most constrained by its geography and history. A narrow, wooded strip of land bordered by a busy road, it offers almost no open land, a battle scenario that took place on the run, and very limited parking, sight lines and viewing areas. To complicate matters, the symbolic importance of the site attracts large numbers of reenactors and visitors, especially during anniversary years.

  Reenactors and park staff must maneuver among these obstacles, along with the NPS restrictions on reenactor presentations, as they plan for the upcoming 225th anniversary of the Lexington/Concord battles. Minute Man's case is an extremely complex one, and there is no easy answer to the difficulties that organizers of this event face. But looking at shared problems of performance may enable them to find common ground in an often-contentious atmosphere. Asking the question, "What could make this work more effectively as a performance?" could be a way to work around issues of geography, policy, and differing commemorative strategies.

- **Recognizing existing common strategies**

At the root of NPS policies on reenactment is a concern about undermining the solemnity of the NPS's approach to memorializing battlefields and other important sites. Reenacted battles, in particular, are unacceptable to NPS policy-makers because of the atmosphere of spectacle and entertainment that they create. Not only are most reenactors enjoying themselves during battles, but the public also tends to enjoy watching them.

However, it is important to note that on the front lines of NPS interpretive programs, many parks employ techniques that lead to a similarly entertaining experience for visitors. It is a fact of historical interpretation and of performance in general that audience attention must be grabbed and held. And the best ways of grabbing and holding attention tend to be theatrical and entertaining: the noise and flash of musket fire, the use of humor or exaggeration, etc.

- At Saratoga NHP, I watched the park's own unit, the 2nd New Hampshire, holding a mock firing demonstration with young visitors. Led by the park's black powder safety officer and one of the seasonal rangers, a group of boys and girls shouldered toy wooden muskets and learned the basics of the Revolutionary War manual of arms.

  The atmosphere of this demonstration was very light-hearted. It was clearly intended to be entertaining as well as educational for both the children and the adults watching them. Ironically, the nearby reenactors had just completed a quite serious session of drilling and firing, which had not been effectively interpreted for the audience. In this case, it was the park staff who were using the techniques of humor and theater to draw visitors into the scene.

National Park Service policies are clear about drawing their interpretive line at turning battles into entertainment or spectacle. But is important to note that some forms of NPS interpretation—like the rifle demonstration at Saratoga and other parks—rely on many of the same techniques and effects that are present in reenacted battles.

Because of their differing value systems, NPS policy-makers draw their line just short of depicting actual battle, where reenactors draw theirs on the other side of it. But while drilling is obviously not as violent or momentous as battle, it is a related activity, not an entirely separate one. Revolutionary War recruits could be miserable, reluctant, or frightened during training, just as they could be during battle. Is it, then, any more appropriate to turn training into an enjoyable spectacle? Any form of living history—including forms that national parks have accepted and used for many years—raises questions about the extent to which we can or should portray the emotions and conflicts of the past.

These questions are more sensitive in the case of portraying something as extreme as combat. They are further sharpened by the perceived adversarial relationship between the NPS and avocational reenactors. But as I have already suggested, parks and reenactors are not as adversarial or as separate as they often seem. And their uses of living history, while prompted by differing value systems, can lead to similar questions about the benefits and effects of living history as an interpretive tool.[1] If parks and reenactors can talk frankly about the places where their use of living history overlaps, they may be more successful in creating shared presentations.

The repertoire of living history techniques has become quite standardized (even, as some reenactors have suggested to me, cliched): there is the musket- or cannon-firing demonstration, the display of arts or crafts, the informal explanation of cooking techniques or other aspects of camp life, and so on.

Although these types of display are far from novel to the interpreters who perform them, they still get the basic interpretive job done. They are ways of attracting visitors' attention, stimulating their curiosity, and perhaps helping them to sense some new kind of connection with historical realities. Although avocational reenactors and NPS staff may

ultimately have different ideas about the messages they want to convey through their presentations, they agree on the need to capture visitors' imaginations as a first step toward understanding those interpretive messages.

- Several reenactors and park rangers spoke to me about their use of the "same old firing demonstration." One ranger pointed out that while it hardly gave visitors a sense of the bigger historical picture, the noise and smoke did convey some sensory information about the past. Beyond that, he felt that the noise of weapons firing often startled visitors into attentiveness and then curiosity about what they were seeing and hearing. Having accomplished that much, interpreters could then begin to talk more about issues and context.

The key to finding common ground around issues of performance, as we will see in the final part of this section, is for parks and reenactors to communicate clearly and frequently, and to be open to a discussion of the advantages (the noise that captures visitors' attention) and the potential problems (the carnival atmosphere that detracts from the solemnity of honoring the dead) of representing history through performance.

Framing the discussion in terms of interpretive goals and strategies may be the best way to maintain a dialogue around the difficult issue of battle reenactment. The fact that many reenactors do approach historical interpretation with at least some degree of performative skill means that there is a door open to discussion of the issue. For example, consider the quote below, from a 1999 survey respondent:

> *So many of the historical reenactments of any size at national parks focus around a military incident or battle location. To have a program at one of these sites and not be allowed to reenact the scenario that led to the establishment of the park diminishes the impact of the program for the reenactors. It's similar to reenacting a historical race at Indianapolis Speedway, but the cars are not allowed to move.*

While there may be underlying differences in values between this reenactor and the National Park Service, he is expressing his views in terms of the performative realism of scenarios at NPS sites. And with the discussion framed in that way, there may be new avenues for negotiation and accommodation.

PRESERVATION

The "bigger is better" mentality

There is an assumption among reenactors that event sponsors are always hoping for the largest possible numbers of reenactors and spectators. As one respondent to the 1999 survey stated:

> *Easing [the battle] prohibition would increase attendance at NPS hosted*

> *events by both participants and visitors as well as increasing our activities at other times. It would make everyone feel better about NPS events in general. The huge scale of recent WBTS [War Between the States] events like Gettysburg 135th, Antietam 135th and so on—and the money made on them—are proof of the potential for revenue and for publicity that the parks are missing because of draconian policies that hamstring our opportunities to perform. Were there problems, accidents, etc. at the WBTS mega-events? Yes. Did they still turn handsome profits for the sponsors? Yes. Live and learn.*

While they often enjoy small events for the opportunities to socialize and relax, reenactors themselves tend to experience their biggest thrills at the "mega-events," where large-scale illusions of historical reality can be created and sustained. And large audiences are an important part of reenactors' sense that what they are doing is culturally valuable and valued.

Further, and with good reason, reenactors recognize that parks, museums, and other historical sites need to attract visitors in order to justify their existence to their respective funding sources. Increasingly, reenactors are becoming savvy about their own role in the "heritage tourism" economy. Another respondent to the reenactor survey pointed to successful large-scale collaborations between Parks Canada and the Revolutionary War reenactment community, including a 1999 event in Nova Scotia that attracted 2,000 reenactors from the U.S. and Canada:

> *Last time they held this event, there were over 80,000 spectators. In addition to the prestige this brings to the site, that is approximately $800,000 in revenue to local businesses in a remote corner of Canada. While not all events need to be this large, I believe that this demonstrates how both reenactors and Park staff can work together.*

However, large reenactor events—and the large crowds they can draw—have the potential to be extremely destructive of physical resources. Parking, foot and car traffic, reenactor camps—all take their toll on a park's landscape. If the weather is bad, physical damage is compounded. I attended large-scale Civil War reenactments on rainy weekends that left deeply-rutted tracks, hastily-built gravel roadways, and mud bogs where hundreds of vehicles had had to be towed out of parking lots that had become swamps over the course of the event.

Staff at national parks shudder at these scenarios. Entrusted with the care of unique historical landscapes for which they feel responsible to succeeding generations of Americans, they are rightfully cautious about sanctioning public events that could damage those landscapes in any way. In this, as in many other ways, they share a concern with reenactors, who also revere these landscapes and passionately believe in the need for their preservation.

However, few park staff members brought out concerns about preservation in the park/reenactor exchanges that I observed during this study. Most negotiations that I witnessed focused instead on safety, education, and authenticity—all of which, as I have suggested, are issues that tend to create artificial divisions between parks and reenactors. Where there is unquestioned agreement—on the need to preserve parks' physical resources—park staff were surprisingly silent.

Perhaps this issue goes unremarked because it is so obvious. But it is precisely *because* it is obvious—because it provides immediate and practical common ground on which parks and reenactors can meet—that parks should emphasize it more.

- At Minute Man NHP, reenactors follow the route of "Battle Road" through Boston's western suburbs. Most of this route is heavily developed now, but the NPS has painstakingly been restoring the national park portion of it to its 1775 condition. This adds greatly to its appeal for reenactors, who can experience much more of a sense of historical reality in the woods than on a paved commercial street.

  However, the restored landscape is also physically more fragile, with unpaved surfaces, stone walls, and limited parking and access areas. To create the illusion of historical reality, many of the conveniences of the twentieth century have been set aside, making it problematic for Minute Man to host large events, especially those, like Battle Road, involving a sequence of performances at multiple sites within the park.

  Most of the discussions I observed at Minute Man NHP focused on the more contentious issues of safety, education, and authenticity. It is possible that if park staff at Minute Man and elsewhere were able to find ways to involve reenactors more closely with their preservation programs, reenactors would be in a better position to understand and accept parks' concerns about hosting large-scale events.

- At Saratoga NHP, a park that currently has very good relationships with its reenactor partners, I asked the Chief of Interpretation what strategies she uses to support NPS policies to reenactors who question them. She explained that she often links the policies to preservation issues, emphasizing the Park Service's dual role as conservators as well as interpreters.

  Like most national battlefield parks, Saratoga is laid out with many stops along a lengthy tour road. Parking areas at the tour stops are not designed for large numbers of vehicles. Events that attract crowds mean that cars must park on the grass, which puts a strain on the physical fabric of the park even if the weather is cooperative.

  Saratoga's Chief of Interpretation feels that it is important to share this kind of concern with reenactors, and to work out the resulting logistical issues jointly.

In a sense, this is also an example of a park that is thinking performatively. Parks are stages for reenactors, but they are also fragile and sanctified places. If both parks and reenactors are thinking in those terms, they are more likely to create joint performances that will express their shared sense of the importance of these landscapes.

COMMUNICATION

The need for good communication is implied in virtually every section of this report. Over and over again, parks who have good relations with reenactors told me about the amount of time they invest in communicating with units in their regions. And when reenactors were asked in the 1999 survey how relations between the NPS and the reenactor community could be improved, many of them mentioned communication:

Talk with reenactors about program/scenario ideas, and about standards.

Communication is always the barometer in relationships.

The Chief Ranger and Superintendent of Castillo de San Marcos have consistently been wonderful to work with; staff relates well to re-enactor community; open dialogue and reception to suggestions, etc. – good communication.

Just [keep] the lines of communication open.

In analyzing what kinds of strategies made for successful communication between parks and reenactors, I identified several key areas, which are discussed below.

- **Ongoing communication**

Long-lasting relationships between reenactors and parks are created when there is communication throughout the year, rather than just around the time of specific events.

- Fort Stanwix NM, a park that relies heavily on reenactor groups in its interpretive programs, has participated in regional reenactor meetings to coordinate event schedules and other concerns in the area. Fort Stanwix also works closely with two local units, who act as unofficial liaisons between the park and other reenactor groups in the region.

- A planned 1999 event at Valley Forge NHP illustrates the importance of maintaining regular communication between the reenactment community and national parks. One particular local unit has been involved for several years in presenting the park's annual "march out" of the troops each June.

This year, the park decided to invite wider participation by units in the area, and sent letters to a list of units about the event.

However, there was no follow-up or personal contact with the reenactors, with the result that none (including the original unit) responded to the invitation and the "march out" was led instead by a park ranger in eighteenth century uniform. Park staff recognized that their contact with reenactor units needed to be much more personal and continuous, and the park is now making efforts to establish closer and more ongoing communication with local reenactment groups.

- **Clear and consistent messages**

As noted above, neither parks nor reenactor groups are monolithic structures. There is a range of opinion within both groups, sometimes overlapping, sometimes conflicting. When either group sends an inconsistent message to the other, confusion and bad feeling can result. Clarity and consistency, even when the messages being sent are unwelcome, seem to go a long way toward creating better relationships between reenactors and parks. Good communication *within* parks and reenactor groups, then, seem to be as important as good communication *between* them.

- At Saratoga NHP, the personalities and expertise of the park staff seem to fit together in a way that creates a particularly broad yet unified approach to working with reenactors.
  - The Chief of Interpretation, who is not a historian by training, views reenactors as a highly-skilled component of the park's volunteer program.
  - The black powder safety officer, an experienced living historian who has been closely associated with many Revolutionary War reenactment groups for many years, is particularly good at articulating NPS policies to visitors and reenactors alike.
  - Other park staff are themselves reenactors, creating an important piece of the continuum of common interests between parks and the reenactment community.
  - Maintenance and protection staff at Saratoga seem to have a strong interest in reenactor activities, making personal contact with reenactors when they are at the park.
  - Reenactors report that they feel very welcomed at Saratoga. It was the park most often mentioned by units responding to the 1999 survey (nearly one-third of the responding units—19 out of 62—had participated in events there) and many of these units spoke very positively about their

experiences at the park. This positive response is not because reenactors feel they can come any closer to reenacting battles at Saratoga—on the contrary, park staff are extremely clear about their support for NPS policies. But although the policies themselves are still unpopular with reenactors, it seems that the park's clarity and consistency on the subject adds to Saratoga's popularity with a community of reenactors who tend to value plain speaking and straightforward face-to-face dealings with people.

- Park/reenactor relations at Minute Man NHP offer an interesting comparison with those at Saratoga. Like Saratoga, Minute Man views reenactors as a valued and skilled part of its volunteer program. And at Minute Man, too, park staff and reenactors overlap, with some current or former reenactors on the staff and some closely-affiliated reenactors (including second-generation Minute Man volunteers and former Eastern National employees) among the reenactment groups associated with the park.

  However, over the course of the past year, reenactors have begun to believe that there is a split within the park. They see the interpretive staff as being much more reenactor-friendly, and protection staff as uninformed or hostile to reenactors. This perception has become widespread within the close-knit Revolutionary War reenactor community; I heard it echoed from reenactors throughout the U.S. after it had first been voiced by reenactors in New England. In my conversations with staff at Minute Man, however, it was apparent that protection and interpretative staff were much more unified than reenactors believed.

  Some leading reenactors responded quite publicly and antagonistically to the idea that protection staff at Minute Man had taken control of the Battle Road event away from interpretive staff. This antagonism—which was not shared by all of the reenactors involved—further strained relations with the park, and has added to the difficulties of planning next year's very large-scale Battle Road event.

  In each phase of this process—the initial misunderstandings at the 1999 event, the reenactors' public challenges, and some "unofficial" responses to those challenges by park staff—inconsistent messages from both park staff and reenactors have compounded the problems inherent in planning and running this extremely complex event. The planning process continues to move forward, however, largely due to the fact that there *does* seem to be clear and consistent communication between the park Superintendent and the chair of the reenactor committee, the two people at the center of the process.

  It is obviously much easier to achieve across-the-board consistency in a smaller, less strained setting. But the events at Minute Man (described in more detail in Case Study A) point to the need for both park personnel and

reenactors to agree among themselves—about expectations, limitations, and goals—when they come to the table to plan for reenactment events at national parks.

- **Understanding reenactors' improvisational style**

The idea of "play" permeates reenactment, and often confuses those outside the community. The atmosphere of reenactment is one of jokes and improvisation, where history, popular culture, and personal experiences are woven together to create a community that is somehow real and imagined at the same time.

This atmosphere can lead observers to conclude that reenactors are just "big kids playing with guns" who are not really serious about what they do. Park protection staff and black powder safety officers, in particular, have tended to be nervous (for obvious reasons) about reenactors' often-playful approach to depicting history. However, nothing could be more misleading than to conclude that because they are playful, reenactors are not reliable or serious.

To understand this paradox, we need to consider once again how performance works, and to look at the specific materials out of which reenactors create their particular kind of performance.

- **Performance itself is "in play."**

  To take on another character or step into an imagined reality, it is necessary to separate ourselves somewhat from definite, literal, everyday realities, and to cultivate a state of mind rich with possibilities and alternatives. In performance—what scholar and director Richard Schechner has called "at once the most concrete and evanescent of the arts" (123)—many things are "in play." Performers play with their own identities, and with the borders between past and present, illusion and reality.

  To create a convincing performance, then, performers must first of all be willing to experiment with those things. The constant verbal and practical joking that goes on among reenactors is an integral part of this process of creation.

- **Reenactment is an improvisational kind of performance.**

  All performances require performers to be willing to experiment and "play." But improvisational types of performance—like reenactment—require an added ability to think on one's feet, and to respond instantly to cues and changes of direction.

As I have noted above, not all reenactors are highly-skilled performers. Many are just as happy to stay in the background. But many more—the majority, I would argue—delight in the challenges of being "in character" and acting out a role in the ongoing, multi-level performance that takes place at reenactor events.

Each level of this performance has a different intensity, and a slightly different set of conventions. Reenactors "act" differently depending on whether they are sitting around a campfire at night, speaking with visitors, staging a complex military maneuver during a battle reenactment, or taking part in a memorial ceremony. Safety, audience, intent, and many other factors influence how loosely or tightly the performance will be "scripted."

But even in formal or somber situations, reenactors still work best when they have some room to respond to what is happening around them. Reenactor performances combine planning and structure (sometimes a great deal of planning and structure) with the understanding that what happens on the field will probably be a little different than what was planned.

As reenactor organizations become more effective and integrated (see Section IV), community leaders are more able to trust that other commanders will respond safely and appropriately to last-minute surprises. This built-in trust, and the years that most reenactors have spent improvising with one another on many levels, create an atmosphere where everyone on the field can enter into the spirit of the performance. They can do this because there is neither too much looseness (which can result in danger to everyone) nor too much rigidity (which can kill the sense of play and imagination that are needed to step into their historical roles).

- Again, Minute Man NHP faces extraordinary challenges because of its limited space and the large numbers of reenactors and visitors who attend the annual Patriots Day events. Park staff and reenactor leaders respond to these constraints by extremely detailed planning and rehearsal processes. Ironically, though, this may contribute to the strain, rather than alleviating it.

  At the 1999 event, miscommunication among park staff and reenactors resulted in a planned scenario at Old North Bridge being halted. Reenactors felt strongly that safety was not at issue, and that they should have been allowed to make a quick adjustment and continue with the scenario. As one Battle Road Committee member put it,

> *If you drop a line in the middle of a play, you improvise and keep on going. You don't yell 'Fire!'*
>
> This incident created a great deal of concern among reenactors, who felt that it illustrated the National Park Service's lack of trust in them. In my interpretation, the incident was symptomatic of a larger difference between reenactors' improvisational, often-playful manner, and park staff's more literal, procedural style.

Parks need to recognize the real achievements of the reenactor community in creating increasingly large, complex, and safe performances, and to realize that a certain amount of latitude or "play" is necessary for a reenactor performance to be successful.

- A weapons inspection at Kings Mountain NMP provided an example of how park staff can enter into reenactors' improvisational spirit without losing sight of safety concerns. The encampment I visited featured a single unit of loyalist militia, portraying poorly-trained and equipped men recently enlisted into royal service.

  When the black powder safety officer discovered one reenactor's musket barrel to be dirty during his morning inspection, he shook his head sadly and remarked, "Well, what can you expect with militia?" The reenactors took up this joke in historical context, pleading lack of time and training, while at the same time acknowledging that the musket needed to be and would be cleaned.

  Both park staff and reenactors later remarked to me that this was an instance where a park ranger pointed out a potential safety problem without seeming heavy-handed or authoritative. He created an opportunity where everyone could acknowledge the problem, ensured that it would be addressed, and framed the whole exchange in the kind of historical role-playing that reenactors naturally practice and respond to.

  As the unit commander in this case phrased it, *"Manner matters."* Reenactors' manner is almost always laced with humor and improvisation, which in no way detracts from the seriousness with which they pursue their visions of the past.

- **Creating a park atmosphere that is welcoming to reenactors**

During the course of this study I heard many suggestions from reenactors and parks about ways to create appealing events despite the ban on battles. Some of these are ambitious; others are quite small. All involve some understanding of what motivates reenactors: a hunger for information about and immersion in

historical realities, a wish to be taken seriously as historical interpreters, and a desire for relationships built on mutual trust and respect—values that reenactors see as characteristic of the past they represent.

- **Additional amenities**

Beyond the standard "amenities" of wood, water, straw, and portable toilets, there are many things parks can do that are greatly appreciated—and remembered—by visiting reenactors.

- Ninety-Six NHS, a park that prides itself on being extremely "reenactor-friendly," built showers several years ago for reenactors to use while they are encamped at the park.

- At the Saratoga encampment I attended, reenactors noted gratefully that maintenance staff at the park had taken the time to split some kindling along with the usual load of firewood, making fire-starting much easier when reenactors set up on Friday evening.

- Many reenactors mentioned parks that had supplied at least one communal meal during the encampment. Not only does this make reenactors' planning and logistics easier, but it provides an opportunity for socializing and camaraderie that includes both reenactors and park staff.

- **Access to park resources**

  - At an encampment at Washington's Birthplace in 1999, the park allowed reenactors to use a reproduction wagon to make their "refugee" impression more authentic. Reenactors were delighted with the effect of this prop, which added depth to their portrayal and attracted the attention of many visitors.

  - Staff at Kings Mountain NMP took reenactors from the Kings Own Patriots to view a historic house in the park that is not usually accessible to visitors. These reenactors were pleased by the invitation, partly because many of them were involved in historic preservation, and partly because it indicated their status as something closer to "insiders" at the park.

  - Many reenactors mention Fort Stanwix NM as an appealing place, largely because participating in events there gives them a chance to camp in a fully reconstructed 18th century fort. Always in search of places where they can immerse

themselves in historical settings, reenactors are attracted to sites where they have access to original or reconstructed buildings or landscapes.

(It should be noted that this can occasionally add to park/reenactor tensions, as in the case of Minute Man NHP. Minute Man's "Battle Road" reconstruction, in the midst of Boston's suburban sprawl, is an appealing setting for reenactor events, to the point that reenactors are even more eager to try to recreate original battle scenes there on Patriots Day.)

- **Other perks**

  - One of the things that most reenactors look forward to at encampments is the chance to visit sutlers—the "historical shopping mall." Since sutlers cannot set up to do business at national parks, discounts at park bookstores are a perk that is valued by many reenactors, who are avid collectors and readers.

  - Gestures of hospitality and appreciation by park staff are noted and remembered by reenactors. Ninety-Six NHS is known for its park-sponsored "jollification" after the park is closed to the public. Parks that have provided period music or refreshments after hours leave a lasting impression with reenactors. These parks are recognizing that beyond the shared public interpretation that parks and reenactors present, they can also be partners in the convivial side of reenactment that is equally important for reenactors.

  - Cowpens NB recently presented a plaque to the unit that acts as a liaison between the park and other units in the region. The presentation was scheduled for the busiest visitor time during a weekend encampment, providing public recognition for the reenactors' efforts.

- **Educational opportunities**

  As noted above in the section on "performance," reenactors create their historical performances out of many different materials, including a great deal of research into primary sources and material culture. Parks that share this type of information with reenactors can enhance the overall quality of their interpretive programs while strengthening their relationships with reenactors.

- One park superintendent told me about offering information to a reenactor who was struggling to make a reproduction of a rare historical weapon. When the superintendent recognized the reenactor's level of seriousness and skill at this project, he issued an invitation to view an original of the weapon itself, which was in the park's collection.

- A reenactor respondent to the 1999 survey suggested that national parks should give reenactors "something they can't get at other events," for example:

  It would be great to have a section of the redoubt built, and full campfire pits. As an example: Fort Stanwix. Reenactors like to go there because they get to experience living in a fully operational fort.

  [Parks could offer] seminars by renowned experts, called a "war college." Perhaps Henry Cook could speak about uniforms, George Neumann about artifacts, George Juno about weapons. It would help us reenactors obtaining information and copies of artifacts and documents.

  He added, "If you give reenactors something, they will give back," an idea that has been confirmed by the sense of reciprocity in many successful park/reenactor relationships.

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[1] Although they are a different genre than living history, park orientation films may also raise questions about the depiction of battle. Most of the orientation films I viewed showed somewhat stylized battle scenes, often using the very reenactors who are prohibited from portraying combat at parks. From a performative standpoint, this type of symbolic representation of battle is not entirely unlike a battle reenactment. While opposing lines are not directly portrayed in the films, the impression of battle is definitely created. The main difference, in fact, may be that in the films, viewers cannot see the "dead" soldiers getting to their feet at the end. Because production values are different in film, more of an illusion of reality can be created. But it is still an illusion. It is not surprising that visitors are sometimes confused or disappointed by the fact that reenactors cannot depict battle scenes, when parks' own presentations may have created an expectation to the contrary.